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SUBJECT: Conference on Afghanistan, March 31, 2009, The Hague

¶1. SUMMARY: This cable summarizes -- by theme -- statements by national delegations and NGOs during the March 31 Afghanistan Conference in The Hague. The Secretary and the UN Special Representative both used the event to bring the international community together around the U.S. strategy and to move to implementation. Key themes included commitments to Afghanistan, security, civilian-military cooperation, regional cooperation, elections, development, Afghan leadership, reconciliation with insurgents, narcotics trafficking, and corruption. END SUMMARY.

¶2. BACKGROUND: Entitled "International Conference on Afghanistan: a Comprehensive Strategy in a Regional Context," the event was organized by the UN, the Netherlands, and Afghanistan, and hosted in The Hague on March 31. More than eighty countries and international organizations participated. UNSYG Ban and Special Representative Eide led the UN delegation. Afghan President Karzai and FM Spanta led the Afghan delegation. Dutch PM Balkenende, FM Verhagen, and Development Minister Koenders spoke for the Netherlands. Secretary Clinton led the U.S. delegation and used the conference to explain the conclusions of the recent U.S. strategic review of the region and to engage in bilateral discussions (reported septel).

¶3. BACKGROUND, continued: Additional materials on the conference and full statements for many nations, including the Chairs' concluding statement, are available on the conference website, afghanistanconference2009.minbuza.nl. An audio file of the Secretary's intervention is available at http://afghanistanconference2009.minbuza.nl/gsp.dll?sid=266&pid=1&p_menuid=47&p_parentmenuid=2. Dutch media and political reaction to the cable will be reported septel. U.S. meetings on the margins are also reported septel.

¶4. UN Representative Kai Eide used his opening and closing statements to strike two themes. His first was "enough gloom and doom;" let's identify programs that work and build on them. Second, he looked to identify real priorities among the many goals of previous conferences, and the statement he issued at the end of the conference reflected these key targets in the major baskets. Secretary Clinton hit the same notes in her remarks and her private meetings, talking to both President Karzai and Foreign Minister Qureshi about developing work plans and implementation groups to carry the now-agreed strategy.

KARZAI CLAIMS PROGRESS

¶5. Afghan President Karzai described the progress made in the past seven years, claiming Afghanistan has "been on the forefront of removing terrorism," developed newfound freedoms of speech and politics, and witnessed the return of five million refugees. He welcomed

President Obama's Afghanistan-Pakistan proposal and said he is fully committed to partnership with the United States and international community. Karzai cited four specific areas where the Afghans will need continued help: security; development; rebuilding; and reconciliation.

¶6. On security, Karzai stated the need to isolate, reform, or remove parties that support terrorism. To accomplish this, he asked for an urgent increase in the

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size of the police force. Karzai identified sustainable development as an effective means of combating terrorism, noting that agriculture and energy should be top priorities. He pledged to root out corruption and said special Afghan intelligence and justice units were being formed to combat corruption, and would include government officials up to the cabinet level as targets. Karzai claimed progress had been made in addressing poppy cultivation but acknowledged problems remained in areas outside of the government's control.

FINANCIAL, TROOP, AND OTHER COMMITMENTS

¶7. Although conference organizers noted this was not a pledging conference, several countries committed to assisting Afghanistan. China mentioned that it would provide an extra \$75 million over the next five years, and Spain said it would contribute a total of \$120 million from 2010 to 2012. Germany mentioned contributing additional funds, but did not specify a dollar amount. Some countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, New Zealand, and Latvia, discussed the possibility of increasing troop involvement. Many countries, including Australia, Germany, Turkey, the Former Republic of Macedonia, and the European Union Commission, affirmed the importance of contributing to military and police training. There were general affirmations of support from countries like France, which made an important gendarmerie proposal, and South Korea.

¶8. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) called for Afghanistan to develop a sustainable revenue base and pledged to help "modernize" the country's revenue generation. The IMF noted that donors could not fill the revenue gap forever. The Islamic Development Bank said it would extend short, medium and long term financing.

¶9. Several countries mentioned non-financial commitments. Albania discussed offering scholarships to Afghans studying medicine in Albania. Kazakhstan is working on completing railroad transit agreements for non-military support. Japan said it would provide assistance in the areas of security, political process, and economic development as well as partnering with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs).

SECURITY

¶10. Many countries highlighted security as a pressing concern. France, Japan, the European Commission and the UN agreed with the United States on the need to improve Afghan capacity through training with partners, an increase in the number of police, and more cooperation. Many participants spoke of moving toward an Afghan military and police force that could ultimately be responsible for providing its own security.

¶11. Another theme was promoting security through non-

military means. Pakistan, China, and Iran spoke of addressing the root causes of terrorism through programs targeted at development, reconciliation, and social welfare. Iran emphasized that extremism has nothing to do with culture, religion, or faith. In addition,

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Portugal and Turkey, among others, spoke of the military as an important piece of the solution, but by no means the entire solution.

CIVILIAN-MILITARY COOPERATION

¶12. There was a consensus that civilian and military efforts needed to be integrated, a point emphasized by Australia, Indonesia, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Russia, and the UK. Russia stated that financial aid and assistance should be used in a way that combined anti-terrorism and socio-economic measures. The UK and the Netherlands focused on the need to expand civilian expertise, in what the Netherlands called "a civilian surge."

REGIONAL APPROACH

¶13. Delegations agreed that any strategy for Afghanistan must address Pakistan and other neighboring states. Many states, including Russia, Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran, agreed that the instability in Afghanistan threatened and affected the entire region. These states called for cooperative and recurring dialogues between the major players, especially Pakistan and Afghanistan.

FREE & FAIR ELECTIONS

¶14. Another point of agreement was that upcoming presidential elections needed to be free, fair, and transparent. Secretary Clinton announced a U.S. contribution of \$40 million for elections. European Union Commissioner Ferraro-Walder announced 40 million Euro. Australia, Germany, the UK, Switzerland, the European Union Commission, NATO and the UN emphasized their support for the elections process through financial assistance, election monitors, and troops to provide security. Slovakia said the international community had an obligation to provide security for the elections. China stated the international community needed to respect the choice that the Afghans made through the electoral process.

DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURE

¶15. Support for new facilities and infrastructure, like roads, schools, airports, hospitals, and irrigation, especially in rural areas, was widespread among the delegations. Germany supports renovating and rebuilding the Mazar-i-Sharif airport, and training civilians in communications and navigation technology. The participants generally agreed that development should encourage the Afghans to achieve economic self reliance.

¶16. The U.S. and other states also expressed support for agricultural initiatives, with Germany calling it a priority. The European Commission, in particular, stressed the importance of agriculture as an alternative to combat and poppy cultivation.

AFGHAN LEADERSHIP

¶17. Many countries stated that Afghanistan's government was ultimately responsible for its future. Iran, France, Pakistan, Portugal, Brazil, and the Netherlands made the point that the Afghans needed to make their own choices as a society about what programs and assistance they needed, and that the Afghans should be encouraged to take ownership of security, development, reconstruction, and other areas as they became ready.

RECONCILIATION

¶18. Reconciliation was not mentioned in great detail, but countries seemed to agree that it was possible to segregate extremists from those who might be willing to reconcile. Russia said that former Taliban needed to make a clear break with Al-Qaeda and pledge to support the Afghan Constitution and laws. Pakistan stated that a genuine dialogue and inclusive politics would go a long way toward encouraging reconciliation. The Organization of the Islamic Conference condemned terrorism as against Islamic teachings and pledged to hold a conference.

NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING

¶19. Russia, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Japan, and Colombia all weighed in on this issue. Russia appealed to all states to help stop narcotics trafficking, while Iran mentioned the need to monitor the border. Colombia brought up the need to break the links between narcotics trafficking and terrorism. Japan mentioned the need for Iranian help. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said that opium production should be fought with subsidies for traditional agricultural commodities.

CORRUPTION

¶20. States agreed with the Secretary's position that in the long-term, corruption could be just as dangerous to success as the Taliban or al-Qaeda. France proposed creating a map of international aid to enhance oversight, while the European Commission brought up the need to reform the judiciary. Canada emphasized the need to restore the rule of law.

OTHER APPROACHES

¶21. China and Indonesia both emphasized that in supporting Afghanistan, countries needed to respect its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Turkey called on the UN to do more, although it did not specify what. Other countries called for a new approach, with Spain saying a "Marshall Plan" was needed, and the Netherlands called for a "new deal" between Afghanistan and the international community. Finally, Kyrgyzstan proposed the creation of an international analytical center to assess and implement

programs, hold negotiations, and engage the Afghan

government in projects.

OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS

¶22. UN:

-- UNSYG Ban called on nations to honor their previous commitments to Afghanistan, deploy additional troops to secure upcoming elections and train Afghan forces, improve food security, improve governance, and protect human rights.

-- Ban's Special Representative, Kai Eide, called on conference participations to affirm their support for the Afghan development and democracy, improve regional cooperation and coordination, and set clear priorities for sustainable progress.

¶23. Netherlands:

-- PM Balkenende noted the delegates' presence "sends a powerful message of hope and confidence."

-- FM Verhagen noted the international community was at a crossroads, requiring the preparation of a new Afghanistan Compact. He called for improved security, governance, development, and regional cooperation.

-- Development Minister Koenders cited progress in improving the quality of life of the people in Afghanistan, called for better coordination among allies and regional partners, and urged a "civilian surge" to expand development efforts.

¶24. China:

-- D/FM Dawei Wu called for respect for Afghan sovereignty while combating terrorism, supporting development, supporting elections and respecting the will of the Afghan people, and expanding regional cooperation.

¶25. India:

-- Special Envoy Lambah called for credible elections, reconstruction led by Afghanistan, combating terrorism and narcotics trafficking, and expanding regional cooperation.

¶26. Pakistan:

-- FM Qureshi called for respect for national sovereignty, reconciliation, close cooperation with local populations to win hearts and minds, promotion of social welfare, capacity building for security forces, and fighting narcotics trafficking and weapons smuggling.

¶27. Iran:

-- D/FM Ahkundzadeh called for coordinated measures against narcotics trafficking, combating the root causes of terrorism such as poverty, strengthening regional cooperation, Afghan involvement and responsibility in its own affairs, and reconstruction. He also argued that additional troops would "ineffective."

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